THE GUEST OF A DREAM

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By Rev. J. N. Ervin, Dayton, Ky.

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I dreamed I was a pillar in the church. I held a position which I esteemed an honor. I was punctual at my post of duty. I never failed to canvass my part of the congregation for any church cause. I was at every meeting of the board of deacons and took my share of the responsibility for all financial methods adopted in the church. We had a paying church, supporting our pastor more handsomely than any other church in town did theirs, and giving largely to all the boards. Representatives of all benevolent causes considered themselves fortunate if they could get their cause before our church. Enthusiastic speakers in Presbytery and Synod often referred to the financial operations of our church as a model, and we were frequently besought to communicate our financial methods for the good of other churches. For some people talk about financial methods as they talk about natural law, as if they would work without anybody to work them. I gave much time to my work.

We had for our pastor a charming man. I was not alone in that opinion. Everybody said so. Other churches complained that he attracted their congregations. Men came to

our church when they would go to none other. We had a dignified church, with all its appointments working with the precision and smoothness of a Corliss engine. Sometimes when a "vacation preacher" was trying to impress us with his best sermon we were wondering how the grandeur of our church was impressing him. I myself abhorred all clap-trap and was very free to say so. I could tolerate no heterodoxy, and we never had a man in our pulpit who preached anything contrary to the current interpretation of the Confession of Faith. It seemed to me, in my dream, that we had the model church, and I was completely satisfied with it. And now, I thought the great Head of the Church had come back to earth. He was once more among men, living in the nineteenth century as he had lived in the first. He was fulfilling, visibly, his promise to be with the Church. He was watching the growth of his kingdom and overseeing its work. He was suggesting and correcting and stimulating. It was, therefore, with satisfaction that I received a polite note asking for the liberty of spending a little time with me. I thought of my comfortable home, of my pleasant family, of my genial friends, of the model church, and in an ecstasy almost, wrote him at once an urgent invitation to make my house his home as long as he could make it possible for him to do so. I waited impatiently for his coming and thought of the pleasure there would be for me in that time. When, at last, I knew the day of his coming, I arranged my business so that I could command my time as I pleased. I would discuss with my guest all those matters which concerned his

kingdom and this particular church. I was deeply interested in this church, and how pleasant it would be to have all these long conversations about it! I remembered, too, how he had loved the country with its lilies and its sparrows and its growing crops, and I would arrange so that he should commune with his Father in the open country once more. I studied the gospels afresh to discover what he most loved, but when the moment came near when he should enter my home to abide, I felt a little trepidation lest I should appear more poorly in his eyes than I was doing in my own. But he was invited and he should come.

CHRIST IN THE HOME.

The Master came as he had been invited. He did not walk as of yore, but he came by rail, and I saw that he was comfortably cared for in a sleeper. I was no Pharisee with mistaken notions of things. I was a well informed Christian. I had studied the gospels till I had some knowledge of the spirit of our Lord. The Son of Man had not where to lay his head, but that was long ago. Now I met him with my carriage and escorted him to my home and assigned him a comfortable room. I had taken the precaution, too, to give a very becoming religious tone to the whole house. I had a profane coachman, who seldom ventured an oath in the presence of ladies, but who sometimes forgot himself when there was no one but myself in the carriage. He was an excellent coachman, however, and I did not care to lose him. I instructed him to use unusual caution not to utter an improper word while

this guest was in my house or in the carriage. The coachman smiled, just a little, as if to say: "I understand you, sir. You are not quite so particular as you knew your guest to be," and he nodded his head. We always used wine at our table, and I had Scripture to justify it. Christ made wine at the marriage feast. But now that Christ was to be actually at my table, I felt a little shaky about the validity of that argument. I was not certain that a glass of wine would look well at his plate. I felt pretty certain that he would not rebuke me for any lack of hospitality if it were absent. So I casually informed the servants that I thought we would not use wine for a while, and they might have the wine set removed.

We have always been a rather impatient family. We were in the habit of speaking quite snappishly sometimes. If my wife did not agree with me, I sometimes spoke my mind quite testily, and justified myself on the ground that a house could have but one head, and, Scripturally, I was that head. We were not quite so cautious with the children as we were with one another, and a stranger might think us rather harsh. Our children inherited our dispositions and copied and enlarged on them. They spoke a little more curtly than we, and used those tones toward their mother and myself as well as to each other. We had picked up, too, our little by-words somewhere, and though we never used them away from home (at least, we parents did not), we did use them at home. We never claimed that these things were virtues, but excused them as harmless infirmities. We could not avoid them. Now it occurred to me that it would

look better not to use our temper quite so freely. So I took occasion to say to the children at table, when their mother was present, that I hoped they would try and avoid any impatient word or gesture while our guest was with us. People might not understand us, or might take our words too seriously, and I reminded them, too, that such frequent use of by-words was not in good form, and while there was any one in the home to hear them, I hoped they would not use them in conversation or play. There were several other little matters which received a regulation before the arrival of the guest.

At last he came, the kindest man with the kindliest face that had ever been seen in our home. The children felt at once the utmost familiarity with him. We older ones felt a little the restraint arising from our carefulness to do what we felt his presence demanded of us whether we had been accustomed to it or not. When we came to the table, the children wondered when he lifted up his eyes to heaven and blessed the gifts of God. For you must know that in our city life we had said that we could not meet together at any one time, even at the table, and often the haste of the meal did not give time for any verbal thanks for the mercies we received. And so when the hour of retiring came and the family Bible was put in the hands of the Master, the children were nonplussed. They had never seen any one but "grandpa" take the Bible thus. They had learned their evening prayer from their mother's lips, but we were too hurried oftentimes for formal prayers, and this with frequent interruptions had caused the cus-

tom of our parents to fall away before our children could remember. We had been too busy to pray in the family. But it did not seem quite right to neglect family devotions while Christ himself was in the house, but it did seem that we must bow about the family altar somehow, while the Lord himself was part of our family. And so it came about that this consciousness of Christ in the house brought about many wholesome changes. Neglected habits of religion were revived and many a useless practice was dropped. And all this because we realized that Christ was always with us.

CHRIST ON THE SABBATH.

Sabbath morning came with Jesus in the house. We had heard of the "blue laws" of New England, and the evil they had done, and had given large liberty in our home, and young life had none of those severe restrictions about it which are said to drive men to hate religion. There was no business to hurry us that day, and the sun was high in the heavens that morning when we arose. I can remember yet how I felt and how conscious I was of the blood in my cheeks when he told me that he had seen the sun come forth in his strength, rejoicing as a strong man to run a race, and that that open window had been as the mountain of old, a place for communion with the Father. The nineteenth century, he said, was as full of God as the first had been, and heaven was as near that city window as it had been to Palestine's sacred hills, if the heart was there to appreciate it. Why had I never thought of that?

I never noticed the noise of the children as I did that morning, and just discovered then that they were carrying all the sports and games of Saturday over into the Sabbath. I reproved them, but they queried why I did, since I had always allowed them to do as they pleased before. It may be I had, but it seemed quite out of place that morning.

As we sat at the breakfast table and Jesus spoke to us of the glories of his spiritual kingdom, I heard the familiar voice cry: "Pa—per." I always get a Sunday morning paper lest I should miss any market change, which might affect my business. Then there are matters of social importance to all of us, and the paper goes around the family. That morning I had the paper taken to the library and put on a shelf. It was left there all day. I felt certain there was nothing in it that day which I must see. I did not care to be seen reading it.

The Sabbath-school hour came and all the little ones trudged off to church. I thought it would be only proper for me to go that day, though I knew the superintendent would open his eyes in astonishment. So the good Master and I went together. How thoroughly Jesus seemed at home there, and how kindly he spoke to every one of the little ones, and how kindly he praised the teachers for their labor of love to him. I did wish then that I had gone to work long ago in that school. But it was too late now. I sat lonely on the visitors' bench while he blessed the little ones and invited the large ones and praised the Christian workers. He said never a word to me, and I knew the reason why.

And when the school was over that morn-

ing I hastily found my own children and told them not to go home that day as they usually did, but to remain and sit in the pew with their mother and myself. It seemed a much better way to treat Jesus than to have them at home playing. The invisible Lord is always in the pulpit, but that morning the visible Lord sat with me in my pew.

We have a beautiful church, modern in all its arrangements, and handsome in all its furnishings. I usually call my guests' attention to this as soon as we have marched down the spacious aisle to our pew. That day I did not think it necessary, and we sat down quietly while the dim light streamed in through memorial windows and obscured glass and many a handsome pattern. Presently the low grumbling of the deep bass notes of the organ broke the stillness, and I heard our organist (the best in the city) touching the keys of our organ, the pride of our musicians. People come to our church sometimes just to hear that organ. The voluntary was varied that da and the musical art was faultless. I looked steadfastly at the organist through it all and was glad of some excuse which would prevent my eyes from meeting those of my guest. I wondered if the suggestion came from some voiceless communion of his mind with my own which made me say, there is art there but no worship. How refreshing the Scripture lesson was and how enjoyable it seemed to have Christ there then! The time for the sermon came. Now, we are excessively proud of our pastor. He is very brilliant. He is always fresh and interesting. False theories in science and philosophy stand no show with him. That day he dis-

cussed the triumph of truth over error, and his text was: "And I saw and behold a white horse, and he that sat on him had a bow; and there was given unto him a crown; and he came forth conquering and to conquer." He marshalled all the forces of the Revelation. Death on a pale horse, and the red horse with the rider with the great sword, and the black horse whose rider held a balance, and the great dragon and the locusts swarming from the pit prepared for war, with faces like men's faces and hair as the hair of women and teeth as the teeth of lions and breastplates as of iron and whirring wings and stings in their tails, and the camp of the Lord was compassed about, and we had a big battle and the banishment of the devil. I grew nervous and turned the pages of my hymn book and wondered if he had always preached so little for edification. I heard my friends remark that it was a grand sermon, sublime, wonderful. It was not referred to at our house. I wished I had told our preacher who would be at church that morning. Perhaps he would have had a different sermon.

It is not often that I attend evening service, but I did that day. I sat in the dreary loneliness of that handsome church. We met many strolling along the streets, and saw many on their porches or in their parlors at their ease. We came back home, and as we separated for the night the Master took down the Book and read and expounded the Scripture: "The poor have the gospel preached unto them." He spoke of our unevangelized city and said: 'The harvest truly is plenteous but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he

would send forth more laborers into the harvest field."

CHRIST IN THE BUSINESS PLACE.

On Monday we walked leisurely through the business places of our city. Here were palaces of wealth controlled by millionnaires, into whose offices the Master stepped with a smile, and whom he commended for their honesty, and their kindness, and their benevolence. And there were others whose ruin he predicted because they were builded by fraud, and were ground out of the life of the poor. We passed by the stock exchanges, and heard the clamor and hubbub and uproar, but we went not in. The dollar mark was sculptured over the door, and at that golden shrine the bulls and bears bowed down. The Master was not recognized as he stepped to the door, and was politely bowed away by the doorkeeper. I remembered the words, "they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts." He went into factories, where men smiled to see him, and recognized him, and proprietors bade him welcome, and said: "Command us and our wealth as you will." We passed by others where he was denied admittance, and they told him as they told the applicants for alms, "We have nothing for you." We passed by fruit markets with rare displays on the tops of boxes and barrels, and said nothing. To a huckster hawking his wares on a narrow street the Master went, and praised him. To another, with exaggerated praise of inferior wares, and with small weights and measures, he went with bitter censure.

"At last we stood in the door of my own

business place. It is a long established house. I took him to my desk, and spread all my accounts out before him, my per cent of profit, my wages to my employés, the brand of goods I bought and sold, and I sat down with easy conscience while he looked them through. I issued my orders to my clerks and dictated my correspondence with no embarrassment before him, for we were doing business by the golden rule, and then we strolled up and down the piles of goods and read the tabs with the cost mark and the selling mark in cipher which I knew he could read. But his steps seemed at last to move instinctively to one small, recent addition to our business, which we had added in conformity to modern customs, a bargain department. It figured largely in our advertisements. We had been keeping the accounts separate to ascertain its profits. We looked over its tables, with cheap prices, goods marked down, remnants, bankrupt stock, insurance stock, large stock direct from the mills and the usual stock of a bargain room. It was profitable. I was not very familiar with its details myself. I had put it in charge of a shrewd man, and he had made it pay. I accepted his statements without asking where the fire had been, or who had assigned, or from what mills he bought direct. I was glad that no questions were asked as we went through, and I took occasion to step out on the pavement soon and draw a long breath of good fresh air. I shall either abandon that department altogether or make radical changes in it. I never want the Master to see it again.

We watched street improvements and the business management of officials.

We noted the speculating institutions with church members at their head. We visited church treasurers who were bank presidents and successful business men, who heaped up fortunes for themselves and let the business of the church run wild, church debts unpaid, church business destitute of method in solicitation, collection and disbursement. We visited our mission societies in all our churches and found that in some little town a half-dozen denominations were supporting little churches at an expense of hundreds of dollars to the mission funds, when a consolidation of some of them would have made others self-supporting and have liberated funds for other work. I confess to a feeling of shame as these facts were pointed out and it appeared that while railroads and manufactories were willing to form alliances with each other and with anything which could enhance their interests, the Church was so devoid of business policy that she was losing thousands of dollars for lack of a wise spirit of comity. In the evening we visited a few church fairs. Sometimes we found mere business transactions whose profits went to the church, and here I was not at all worried save when sometimes I saw some purchaser hugging the delusion that he was giving to the church when he was only getting a good bargain for himself. But we found some other business not to our liking, and I expected to hear the Master call them "dens of thieves" as we made our way among raffles and grab bags and games of chance. But he passed on. "These," he said, "know my will. I will allow them to do as they please and give ac-

count of themselves at the end of their day." We saw many things that made the heart of the Master glad that day, and many that grieved him sore. For he blushed for his people sometimes as he saw their business places and their business methods.

CHRIST AS A FELLOW-TRAVELLER.

The time came when I must make a business trip. Matters in a distant city demanded my attention. I would be absent about a week, and I would leave my guest in my home till I returned. But when I made known my purpose, he expressed a desire to go with me and share my journey. So we went, and in the railway car and at the lunch counter and in the hotel, and amid all the vexatious delay of travel incident to such a journey, he was a delightful companion and his amiable ways so touched all our fellow-travellers that I was proud to acknowledge him as a friend. Some of his ways were not like ours, but they seemed extremely right. Once I was worried by a nervous little woman in front of me with four small children, all heirs of her nervousness and all determined to cry incessantly. I tried to read my paper, but the annoyance was too great. I was on the point of going to another car when the noise subsided and I ceased to wish such women would stay at home forever, and I lost myself in my budget of news. When I had read my paper, I discovered that my friend was not in his seat; he was carrying cups of water and devoting himself to that nervous woman and her nervous children. They were entranced with the charm of his man-

ner. The tears were all gone and the cheeks were rosy and the eyes bright. I have tried his way several times since, and it has always added a charm to travel. He seemed to be a sort of everybody's servant in the car, anticipating the wants of the asthmatic old lady and raising the window for her, and bringing coffee for the invalid in the faded calico whom no one else noticed.

I had sent word to my friends and the hotel of my coming, and had arranged to meet my friends in the parlor of the hotel. Here we discussed trade, and made our bargains, and talked of politics, with my fellow traveller an interested listener and companion. I consulted him on principles of trade and fair dealing. But when we arose after our conferences, and were invited to step into the bar. I surprised my friends by declining. I never went to the bar anyhow, except when I was abroad, but I used to hold that I was liable to lose some of my best business contracts if I did not go with my friends. That day I feit certain I could not take him with me. and did not care to be seen going without him. Some of the gayer sort, who used to assemble in the parlors in the evening, used to count me among them, and were a little surprised that I was not quite so cordial as I used to be, but I confess that that presence laid a very wholesome restraint on many of my movements.

Sunday morning, when I stepped before the clerk's desk, he volunteered the kind of information I had been accustomed to ask. He remembered my taste. There was to be a sacred concert at the Opera Hall that afternoon. The best contralto in the country was in the city, and would sing at the

Church of the Grand Oratorio that morning. The new minister at the Unitarian church was very brilliant, and would lecture on the genius of Charles Lamb that evening. I thanked him, and walking out with my companion, found a little church I had never visited before, and a godly and cultured minister noted for his intense spirituality. I felt that that was the best place for a professing Christian who was away from home, and had Christ with him. I had no difficulty in persuading myself that affairs at home were not so imperative as to compel me to start home that evening, though I had usually begun my journey on a Sunday evening to save time. We returned to the same church at the evening service. In the afternoon the Master was alone with his Father, except when he took me with him to one of the city missions, where he spoke to the toiling and crushed and careworn who were gathered there, and as he came from this mission he asked me: "Where are the laborers in this great city to-day that they are doing nothing for the poor among them?" I had to confess that the church members were not all church workers, and that "in all probability many of them were at their homes, at that hour, asleep." We returned on Monday to my home and business, and I have always looked back on that trip as a bright spot in my life. I learned some lessons then I have never forgotten about my behavior when I am away from home.

CHRIST IN THE LIBRARY.

One room in my house was a favorite resort for all of us. It was the library. We

were a reading family, and bought books to read. We bought books which suited our individual tastes. We bought books to cultivate a better literary taste. We bought and read the popular books of the times. We watched the book market and the reviews, and found out what other people were reading. We had the standard books which form the nucleus of private libraries. We were not seeking for old editions or rare books. We had books in the best style of the book-maker's art, in binding and printing and illustration and paper. There were works of art beautiful and valuable. A few choice pictures adorned the walls, and a few pieces of statuary adorned the cases of books or the niches between the books. Of course no guest ever came and went without seeing the library. On the very day that the Master came I thought of the library, and went into it with a book-lover's pride to see that it was properly arranged. There were a couple of small steel engravings hanging low down on the walls which I took down and laid in a drawer. I had secured them because they were specimens of fine art, real "art for art's sake." I had sometimes insisted that it was hampering art to trammel it with any moral purpose, and these engravings were entirely untrammelled in this direction. It occurred to me then that Christ in his life had been intensely ethical and I expected to find him so yet. With a glance at the wealth of literature on the shelves I went out again and closed the doors. It was not long after till he and I were in the library alone. Here were histories, ancient and modern, showing how

"Through the ages one increasing purpose runs,
And the thoughts of men are widened with the
process of the suns."

Here were volumes of science telling us that the "undevout astronomer is mad." Here was the Bible, and about it commentaries and church histories and polemics and volumes against the Christian faith from which we had been trying to find the strength of our enemy. Here were essays with intellect and sentiment and wit, concerning some of which we were anxious that none should ask any question. And when he went to the shelf and took down one or two and glanced at them, I managed to be busy arranging some loose pamphlets on my desk. Here was fiction and light literature. I never had noticed before that we had so much of it. I knew that we had been buying new stories from every new writer who startled the world of letters, but had not thought it had accumulated to quite such an extent as it had. We had the most famous from Germany and France. We had read Scott and Dickens, and watched the face of the guest as he looked at them. I talked of the delight and value they had been to me. Of foreign authors such as Dumas and Tolstoï I had little to say. For many of them I felt very keenly. There was nothing to say that I would care to have said on the score of art or morals. There were some which made light of religion and marriage and home, which I had read to enjoy the wit, which I now secretly wished were not there. I was ready to turn elsewhere long before the Master quitted that alcove. Many another day we spent there, and sometimes among its romances. In history he saw his Father at work. In

science he saw his Father's doings. In philosophy he saw the workings of that noblest earthly work of God—the human mind—now, alas, too sadly crippled! And he watched with careful eye each book which I was reading. I retired some volumes out of sight while he was there, and some I burned, and I bought with caution in those days when I remembered that he would see every book I bought. I watched the movements of his eyes as he saw my children take down their favorite authors. And a gleam of holy indignation was one day in his eye, as turning to me, he said: "My people shun as a nest of vipers all impure and degrading associations on the streets, and will not permit their children to meet the vile, but in the library those children meet and are introduced to the vilest of souls in print and paper. In fiction they meet heroes and heroines who speak vulgarities and blasphemies, and ridicule morality and propriety. As the down of the thistle carries the noxious seed into the farmer's field, so does the down of entrancing fiction and polite literature carry seeds of iniquity into the hearts of the children of God." And I wondered, when he ceased speaking, how he must regard hosts of characters in literature who walk with brazen effrontery before the receptive eyes of Christian youth, led by the magic wand of some famous writer, and introduced into Christian homes by Christian parents.

CHRIST IN SOCIETY.

We did not believe in isolation from society. We were not puritanical and we looked with good-natured pity on the history of those well meaning but narrow people, whose views and practices gave birth to the word. Of course, we knew what the Church was accustomed to say about conformity to the world. We had seen "deliverances of the Assembly" on that question. But man is a social being, and how can he be social if he will not conform to social customs? And then we could point to good church members who were not very strict in this regard. And man must have amusement. And we might do worse things than those which the Church looks on with such disfavor. We were included in the better social circle of the city. People expected to see us wherever the "best people" go. We cared for nothing low or unworthy, but we cultivated society. Our guest had been in our home some time and we were glad to introduce him to our friends as they came to our house. Sometimes he talked a little more religion than we were accustomed to in our social gatherings, but he was such a thorough native gentleman that we thought nothing of his earnestness in urging the claims of the gospel. And then he talked thus to some who seldom or never heard religion talked elsewhere. For, of course, our circles were formed by social standing and not by any religious considerations. I do not know that I had ever thought of the religious complexion of our circle till that time. Sometimes, too, their conversation struck me as being more than usually trifling. And after an evening thus spent nothing of dignity or worth seemed to have been discussed. Being so closely identified with the church it was a matter of course that committees on church matters often

met in our parlors. These were delightful meetings, and I felt entirely at ease when the spiritual things of the church were the theme of discussion, but I was not quite so enthusiastic in my work for picnics and Christmas festivities as I used to be. It seemed a little singular that this phase of church life should occupy so much time while my guest was in my house. When it was suggested that we form a society for the study of the Scriptures together, I was delighted, for since the Master had come to dwell with me I felt more interest in the Word.

My daughter surprised me one evening by telling me that I had promised to take her to hear Booth that night. I had hoped she would forget it, but was not inclined to tell her I would not go. So I asked her to meet me downtown, and we would take supper at the hotel and then go. I felt for some reason as if I should like to have as little said about it at home as possible. I was cautious that no reference should be made to the matter afterwards. I have always said, of course, that there was no harm in an occasional evening at the theatre. But I did not think it would be proper to ask him to go with me, and I felt afraid to defend myself before him.

For weeks my guest remained in my house and gradually worldly and questionable habits disappeared, and others which I knew would please him took their place, and when he spoke of going, I begged him to remain. Never had we had so much happiness before, never had we known what true joy was till we had learned to regulate our lives by the presence of this divine

visitor. He had just agreed that he would make his home with me permanently when my happiness became so great that I awoke. It was a dream, and yet in invisible but potent reality it shall not be merely a dream.

I thought it all over again in my waking hours, and I do not believe that the dream will ever lose all its influence over me. I realize now that Jesus is my present guest. He is at my side in the sanctuary, and in the home, and by the way, and I find myself stopping to ask myself if I am showing due courtesy to a guest who has come down from heaven to dwell with me. In my ease and self-indulgence, am I treating Jesus right? And when I am undecided, I say why do I not do that which I am certain, will meet his approval, rather than run any risk? Holiness and unholiness cannot dwell together, and if the Holy One is ever with me I realize the need of being myself holy. And so may I be ever with Christ.

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Have you ever realized, reader, not merely that an eye of divine record gleams on you from the throne of the Judge, but that the Saviour is with you a present, a constant companion, in every moment of your earthly life? It is a sacred, a precious truth.

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